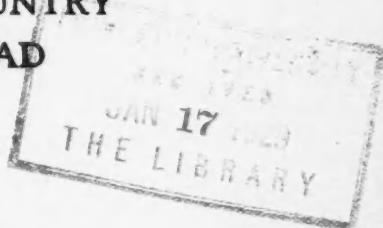


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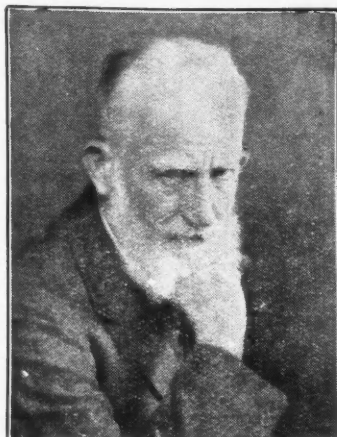
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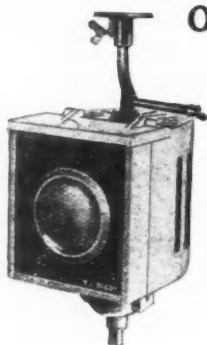
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DRAMA

VOL. VII

JANUARY MCMXXIX

NUMBER 4

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By G. W. Bishop

SINCE Mr. J. T. Grein's article in last month's DRAMA, over twenty plays have been produced, most of which I have seen. Half of them deserve only cursory attention and some five or six have already been withdrawn.

One of the most delightful evenings was spent at the Lyric, Hammersmith, where Sir Nigel Playfair is presenting the Quintero comedy, "A Hundred Years' Old," in Mr. Granville-Barker's English version. Mr. Horace Hodges' portrait of the Centenarian is a beautifully mellow study and the whole play a delicate treatment of an attractive idea. It is a piece of sentiment that never degenerates into sentimentality. I also enjoyed Mr. Benn Levy's "Mrs. Moonlight," at the Kingsway, although in that play the author more definitely sets out to draw a tear from the audience by theatrical device. At the end to let the pathetic little lady—doomed for life to keep her youthful good looks—wear her fifty-year old birthday frock was effective "sob-stuff"; but, to my mind, not nearly so moving as the farewell scene in the second act with the husband who failed to recognize her. Miss Joan Barry gives a superb performance as Mrs. Moonlight.

I missed "Jealousy"—a remarkable play for only two characters—at the Fortune, but it was a pleasant experience to renew acquaintance with "Doctor Knock," which was given a more spirited performance by the Masque Theatre company at the Strand, than it received at the Royalty

a year or two ago. Dr. Knock is a really fresh comic creation. "Clara Gibbings" brought back Miss Violet Loraine to the stage and she acted her first "straight" part with a consistent feeling for character and a certain display of emotion. But the fact that a song has now been added is some indication of the quality of the play!

Much was expected of the Molnar-Wodehouse combination, "The Play's the Thing," at the St. James's, but the chief point of the play was left in the Lord Chamberlain's office before the opening night. Besides, the piece was not too well acted—or rather it was taken in a too respectable spirit by the company and fell flat. Sir Gerald du Maurier seemed unhappy about the whole affair on the somewhat uncomfortable first night. It came to London from America, and so did "Burlesque," which had a much better time at the Queen's. This efficient affair, somewhat on the lines of "Broadway," is full of expressive slang about theatrical "shop" and finished with a typical "Road Show." Mr. Nelson Keys adopts convincingly the American idiom as the comedian who cannot keep straight without his charming wife. He is the only Briton in the company which includes, in Miss Claire Luce, an actress of distinction and beauty. "Burlesque" is ingenuous but thoroughly entertaining.

At the Everyman there was a welcome revival of "Little Eyolf," particularly notable for Miss Mary Merrall's magnificent acting as Rita; and the Gate Theatre pro-

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

vided an interesting evening with O'Neill's poignant "All God's Chillun'." The Old Vic. made a valiant attempt to produce Miss Clemence Dane's tragic pantomime with music, "Adam's Opera," a piece with good moments that lacked conciseness and direction. Mr. Richard Addinsell's music, based largely on the nursery rhyme tunes, was the best feature of the evening.

I must pass over "Funny Face," a really amusing show on conventional lines and "The Rose and the Ring," another adaptation of the famous Thackeray story and a good Christmas entertainment. The visit of M. Jacques Copeau with the Vieux Colombier company for a couple of matinées was a remarkable experience which cannot

be dealt with in a few lines and I can only hope that the performances have been dealt with elsewhere in **DRAMA**.

I cannot close my brief survey without a reference to the Stage Society's production of "Journey's End," the finest war-play that has been seen on the stage in my opinion. It fiercely indicts war and yet there is not a word of propaganda or complaint in the three acts. The characterization is perfect—crisp, reticent, sensitive studies of men drawn by a man who feels deeply and rightly—and if the play is not put on for public performances I shall for the first time begin to lose hope about the English theatre.

DRAMA OF YESTERDAY & TO-DAY

By Hermann Sudermann

This is the last piece of critical work written by the distinguished German dramatist, whose death so regrettably occurred on November 19, 1928.

IT is not easy to discuss the drama of yesterday and to-day; the subject raises such manifold problems that one hardly knows where to start and where to leave off. Every question touched upon at once sets a mass of others rolling down like an avalanche. I may, therefore, be permitted only to glance here and there at the surface of things.

For example, it is, in itself, exceedingly difficult to lay down a line of demarcation between the drama of to-day and the drama of yesterday. From what perspective is it to be drawn? The contemporary one? Strange to say, not even the world-war brought about a distinct *cæsura* or sharp break in dramatic poetry. The physical existence or non-existence in life of particular authors certainly cannot be taken as the measure. Therefore, there might remain perhaps, as the decisive factor, the extent to which poetic effect still lives. But this latter, as we know, is the case to no small extent, even with Shakespeare and Goethe; and Ibsen,

prematurely condemned to death because his setting of problems was overtaken by the march of time, is, on closer investigation, found to be still fully alive, while Pirandello, generally considered to be a representative of the moderns, in spite of a certain discordance in his artistic attitude, adheres to the realism of bygone days.

The picture has, in fact, only shifted very gradually and is still shifting slowly. In what direction? Perhaps back to the original form. Perhaps the drama "of yesterday," the vitality of which, I hope, is not extinguished but only latent at the present moment, may be the drama of to-morrow. For the present, it does seem that the development of the drama since Strindberg and Wedekind, has passed from the direction of emotional style to that of cerebral literary creation, without its needing to pass, on that account, into entire abstraction, as proved by the example of Shaw and, finally, of John Galsworthy, Karl Steinheim, and Georg Kaiser. A

DRAMA OF YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

real survey and, consequently, a judgment of the position of the drama of to-day and its relation to its predecessors, can, however, never be obtained so long as the theatre, which serves as its mouthpiece, does not energetically free itself from subservience to factors far removed from what is intrinsically "artistic." A view of the repertoires of the theatres in which the Paris Boulevard play and the American criminal play gain positive triumphs proves how far we are at present from the fulfilment of our hopes. We must, unfortunately, put on record the fact that the disparity between the merits of the plays produced and those of the actors playing in them, becomes more and more grotesquely wide.

"That is what the public wants," says the Theatre Manager, in self-justification. But the public only looks at such dramatic nonentities for want of something better. It is a vicious circle. It can, therefore, occasion no surprise if, with these theatrical methods, hardly worthy even of the cinema, a shortage of valuable plays gradually makes itself manifest. It is quite intelligible why the dramatist will not write for a vacuum; he requires to see his creations, not merely with the mental but also with the physical eye. If this perfectly reasonable and modest reward is continually withheld from him by unfavourable circumstances, then it is best for him to lay down the dramatic pen, if possible without bitterness. In many cases there is a likelihood that the creative impulse will then pass over from the dramatic view-point and treatment to the epic. When this does not happen, little remains but the hope of kindlier times. Nevertheless, it is true that from this passive attitude the danger arises of a gradual extinction of the power of the Muse owing to insufficient exercise.

I, myself, in the course of the last decade, have devoted myself more extensively, and since 1923, exclusively,

to epic poetry. The "Litauischen Geschichten" (Lithuanian Tales), which appeared during the years of war, and the "Bilderbuch meiner Jugend" (Pictures of my Youth) completed in 1922, were followed by "Der tolle Professor" (The Mad Professor), and the novel of confession "Die Frau des Steffen Tromholt" (The Wife of Steffen Tromholt). A merry story for little girls, a "Roman von Jugend, Tugend und neuen Tänzen" (Romance of Youth, Virtue and new Dances), which I christened by the dog's name "Purzelchen," was only completed by me a short time ago, and now I am up to my neck in work on a new epic production. . .

CLIFTON ARTS CLUB

The Club's annual Dramatic Contest of Original Plays was held, for the third successive year, on October 31, November 1, 2, and 3 last. As before, plays were submitted from all over the country for adjudication in manuscript, and Miss Esme Church, of the Old Vic, who kindly consented to act as MS. adjudicator, awarded the Second Prize, for the best play as read. Of those entered for the First Prize (for the best play as performed), she chose six to compete in actual stage production, as follow:—First Night: "The Convent Picture," by Alice Worsley; "The Job," by Cyril Roberts; "The Way Out," by Stephen Barnett. Second Night: "The Deliverer," by C. M. Haines; "The Atoning Sea," by May Welshman; "So Good," by Cyril Roberts. The Judge of the Contest was Mr. William C. Fay, producer of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and founder of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Mr. Fay gave his final award to "So Good" by a narrow margin from "The Convent Picture." Mr. Fay gave very high praise to the winning play, (a satirical comedy) and its presentation, describing it as an absolutely faultless little play which was fit, as acted, to be put on any professional stage in the kingdom.

This opinion was endorsed by the audience, who awarded the Third Prize by a vote. This award also went to "So Good" by a large majority, but this being already a prize-winner, the prize to "The Way Out," the runner-up. The Second Prize was awarded by Miss Church to "The Last Post" by Alma Brosnan. In accordance with a previous undertaking, this play will be produced by the Club in January next. Miss Church placed "So Good" second, so that this play all but won every prize of the Contest—to the delight of all concerned, who knew that it is mainly to the brilliant talents and untiring efforts of Mr. Roberts, the author, and Mrs. Roberts, the producer, that the success of the annual Contest is due. The winning play will, of course, enter for the National Festival.

THE REVIVAL OF THE RELIGIOUS PLAY.—II.

By Kenneth Ingram

This continues and concludes the article printed in our last issue, and is of much interest at the present time when the legal position as regards plays in Church is under discussion.

WE have come so far—that the true setting is an amateur and a genuinely religious setting, which means the town or country parish. And then, at once, you begin to encounter a new set of difficulties.

These difficulties arise because a parochial production must be governed by the need for simplicity. But simplicity is not crudity. In fact, crudity is generally caused by aiming at ornateness, without having the capacity to be ornate. The word "amateur" has some unfortunate associations, and there is nothing much worse than the badly-done amateur religious play. I saw one such production in a church, and though I have tried to forget it, I am afraid I never shall! An amateur production must always fail where its primary object is to give satisfaction only to those who are taking part in it. It succeeds where it remembers that it has something to convey to the audience; and this is particularly true of the religious play. The only purpose is the only purpose at which any play should aim: that it is going to make an impression, to leave some mark on those who see it.

Nor does simplicity mean a want of skill. It is essential that the producer of a religious play, even if it is given in the most primitive village church or hall, should be an artist and should have learnt the art of production. The producer is more important in this kind of play than in any other, because he is dealing with inexperienced players. The simpler the setting and the material, the more essential is it to make the production good: there is less camouflage to hide its defects. The worst enemy of parochial undertakings of this sort is the superstition that good intentions are a substitute for practice and skill. "I'm sure they all tried to do their best," someone who was responsible for an atrocious production once said to me. But they should

not be allowed to experiment in this way unless they know how to try. As well expect an imperfect musician to play a Beethoven sonata without practice. No doubt he "tries to do his best," but it is such a bad best that he should not be allowed to victimize an audience with his good intentions.

The two difficulties in production are the dresses and the accent of the players. It is not, perhaps, very wise for a man to talk about the art of dressmaking, and I shall only commit myself to the extent of saying that I believe it is possible to make good stage dresses out of quite cheap material, and to lay emphasis on the fact that the absence of scenery, or ornate scenery, makes it all the more necessary to supply colour and ornament through the dresses. Scenery is very little trouble. If the producer is an artist he will know how the best effects, the purest background, can be provided by simple draping and hangings. In one of the most elaborate nativity-plays which are produced—a play to which I shall presently refer—the only scenic properties are a dark curtain, a blue dais, and two lemon trees. The colour effects are entirely produced by the dresses.

Accent is a much more acute difficulty. Any voice or choir-trainer knows how painful a process it is to remove the native drawl or twang, but it can be done, in time. The producer of a village play, however, has little time and he is up therefore, against a very practical obstacle. There are two comments I would make on this point, and the first is that there are accents and accents. Some dialects, like the pure West Country, or the Irish of Dublin, or the West Highland, are virile and pleasing. It is not at all unsuitable that a Christian play should be spoken through the medium of a fresh peasant brogue, for if Christianity means anything, it means that



WORKING MODEL BY AUBREY
HAMMOND FOR A SCENE IN
PICKWICK. BASIL DEAN PRO-
DUCTION AT THE HAYMARKET
THEATRE



THE ROSE AND THE RING.
COSTUME DESIGNS BY GEORGE
SHERINGHAM FOR THE PRO-
DUCTION NOW RUNNING AT
THE PLAYHOUSE

THE REVIVAL OF THE RELIGIOUS PLAY.—II.

it belongs to every age and every race. A mystery play which is a mere attempt to reproduce certain scenes which took place in Palestine two thousand years ago, is not Christian at all. It is essential that such plays should be as rich with modern meaning as they were contemporary to mediæval or first-century times. Christianity is applicable to any medium, so long as it is a good medium. The good accent is not to be despised.

But there are less pleasant dialects, which, perhaps, I had better not enumerate, lest I outrage any local patriotisms. I will only say that the worst of all dialects is, of course, the "Oxford drawl." Only with superhuman effort can the player be trained to eradicate that vocal disease. It is bad, because it is due to a suppression of energy, an affected laziness which refuses to take the trouble to differentiate the vowel sounds. But, so far as we are discussing village productions, the "Oxford drawl" is not likely often to be encountered.

The difficulty of accent is only one among many reasons why the religious play is at its best in action, and always at its worst in spoken lines. I wish I could really impress that on would-be authors. I have already alluded to the experience of Mr. Masfield's play in Canterbury Cathedral, acoustic considerations being another reason why dialogue is less suitable. Besides, there is an infinite wealth of opportunity for unspoken drama in any nativity or passion play. You have the profound advantage of dealing with scenes and episodes which are familiar to everyone. Even where it is not *tableaux* which you are showing, you have endless material to draw upon, and, particularly when you have amateur players, you are almost certain to fall to a lower level directly you put words into their mouths. I do not suggest that you can entirely eliminate the spoken parts—it depends, of course, on the kind of religious play you are attempting. But, personally, I am convinced that in the nativity, or the mystery play, the pageant and tableaux are much the more effective, unless you are dealing with exceptional talent.

You need, of course, music, and music.

even in the simplest surroundings, should not be a difficulty. There is a store of beautiful carol music and of hymns to draw upon, and it is essential, if this kind of play is to be a success, that you should invite a large element of congregational singing. It does not destroy the objectivity of the play, and it certainly introduces an affinity between audience and players which is quite essential if you want to create a true atmosphere for this type of production. Indeed, if I were to be limited to one single piece of advice, I should choose as text the dictum that a religious play should be one in which both stage and auditorium take part. The play must not be something which is out to win applause. It should be a united action, and music is the bridge by which you can draw both players and audience together.

There is one other comment I must make under this head, and it is a form of criticism which even my limited experience tells me it is necessary to make.

I happen to be, for my sins, the editor of a small quarterly magazine (which is connected with the Anglo-Catholic Movement). I share therefore the editorial lot of having vast quantities of MSS. hurled upon me, all of which I have to read, and the major proportion of which I have to reject.

Now a considerable number of these MSS. are religious plays. Many are accompanied by a letter from the author, who assures me that the play has already been acted in some country parish, and has been such a phenomenal success that all the players have united in an enthusiastic request that it may be published, so that other country, or possibly town, parishes may have the benefit of acting it. In vain I reply that I fear that where the local and personal interest in the author is removed there is little hope of the play being acted.

I am thus made aware that a certain number of these productions provide the opportunity for the energies of budding playwrights. A few of these MSS. have been good, but I wish that when a country parish undertakes this excellent work, it would not suppose that the play itself must emanate from one of the parishioners. The production should be in amateur hands, the players should be amateurs, professionalism

THE REVIVAL OF THE RELIGIOUS PLAY.—II.

is peculiarly unsuitable in this particular field of dramatic activity. All that we can freely admit. But unless the play is of exceptional merit, I would plead that it is wiser to make use of the excellent plays already in existence, which could easily be adapted to every kind of local need.

It always seems ungracious to criticize the literary contributions which one has to reject, although I could tell a long story of sickly sentiment to which imperfect religious writing especially lends itself. I could speak feelingly of the dreadful verse which only too often has to go forwards and backwards in the post. But that hardly belongs to this subject, and it is an ungracious criticism—ungracious because the reason why the contributor is so deceived as to its value is because he—or she—has really a noble idea, vaguely in mind, which he has failed to get down on to paper. He is so inspired by the idea, that he does not realize he has failed. He sees, not what he has written, but only what is in his mind. The difficulty in all art is, not the inspiration, but the transcription. And that fact the editor ought very tenderly to remember.

There is only one other comment I have to make regarding practical difficulties, and it is not one upon which I desire at all to enlarge. I am afraid a great many producers do not realize that, at present, a dramatic production, where money is taken, either in church or in a hall, needs a licence from the Lord Chamberlain. My only personal experience in this matter is that the Lord Chamberlain is sympathetic over these plays, even though he does not normally allow a presentation of *Our Lord* on the stage. He raised no difficulties at all in the case where I was personally concerned.

I now come to the last of my points, and you will remember that this concerns the response which will be forthcoming whenever an effort is made to produce religious drama. Whatever difficulties and problems the producer has to encounter, the labour will be well worth while.

I can give you my personal experience, but this cannot, I am afraid, be taken as a normal example. I have been associated for several years with a nativity pageant, which is produced under the auspices of St.

Mary's, Graham Street. This is not an altogether normal example, because we have been able to spend money on the production and to take enormous care that in every detail the Pageant should be peculiarly beautiful and perfect.

What has been our experience? We began in a little private hall of our own, which was unlicensed and for the seats in which we could not therefore charge. It held about 250 people, and we distributed free tickets asking people to contribute in a collection towards the expenses. We always more than met our expenses.

Then, in our third year, we decided to take the plunge and come out into the open. It was a risk, but we took the Chelsea Town Hall for a Friday and Saturday afternoon performance—just before Christmas. On the Friday every seat was taken. On the Saturday a dense crowd was standing in all available gangways, and 300 people failed to gain admission.

The following year we went to the "Old Vic," and since then we have taken up our abode at the Chelsea Palace. We give five or six performances, always in the afternoon—because of the smaller children. We invariably find that the theatre is packed, not by our own people, not even exclusively by Londoners, but by people as far away as Exeter and Birmingham. Last Christmas we gave six performances. Our expenses were over £500. But we managed to hand £825 over to charity.

This year a new play has been produced in the same circumstances, and with even greater success. It is described as "*The Merry Masque of Our Lady in London Town*." The Masque develops the Gospel story beyond Christmas, interpreting it in the light of Catholic ceremonial. The setting is English fifteenth century, and the familiar scriptural scenes take place, therefore, in medieval London, and are linked closely to the ceremonies of Holy Week and Easter, as seen in Catholic churches to-day.

I do not say that every religious play is likely to have the success of the elaborate Graham Street production. But I am sure that any attempt of the simplest kind will find a ready response. I have never heard of a nativity or mystery play failing to draw an audience.

"SYMPATHY" IN THE THEATRE

By Wilfred Crompton

A PLAY AGENT has declined to interest himself in a play of a friend of mine on grounds which surprise and perplex me. He admits that the play is a good one; he even praises its technical skill. Then, however, he concludes his letter: "The play is clever and well done, but the characters are unsympathetic, so I fear it would not make any appeal commercially." He gives one the impression that, in his opinion, a play dealing with unsympathetic characters, however favourable its other qualities may be, seldom pleases the modern public.

"Unsympathetic" is, perhaps, a somewhat vague term, capable of a wide range of interpretation, but presumably it is safe to suppose that an unsympathetic character is one towards whom most people would experience a feeling of distaste. The agent evidently considers, therefore, that audiences eschew such characters; virtually he says that people dislike meeting in the theatre persons whom they would dislike meeting in life.

His view does not seem to be supported by the facts. During the last two or three years, which authors have made most "appeal commercially"? Mr. Frederick Lonsdale, Mr. Noel Coward, Mr. Edgar Wallace, Mr. Somerset Maugham, and Mr. Eden Phillpotts. During the same space of time, which player has shot most notably into prominence as a new "box-office draw"? Miss Tallulah Bankhead.

Mr. Lonsdale's immense success is based on the exploitation of bad manners; his plays bristle with ill-bred aristocrats who bandy emasculated Billingsgate with an assurance and an impudence almost terrifying. Mr. Coward specializes in selfish, indolent, pert-spoken young women who are dreadfully fidgety and bored with themselves and everyone else. Mr. Wallace devotes himself to criminals: thieves, blackmailers, murderers—he does not mind so long as they are wanted by the police. Mr. Maugham seldom writes a play in which at least one of the protagonists is not guilty of adultery. Mr. Phillpotts dotes on inveterate drunkards, faded spinsters

who make grotesquely inept and ignoble efforts to get married, and elderly farmers who set out to procure a wife in the same spirit of cold-blooded, bargaining appraisal with which they would embark on the purchase of a pig. While the plays in which Miss Bankhead appears achieve their longest runs when she impersonates young women who are riddled with hysteria; at moments of crisis these tiresome freaks even publicly tear off all save the more intimate portions of their clothing.

These, then, are the kind of characters whom people delight to meet in the theatre. Of that the box-office receipts provide irrefutable proof. But I cannot share the agent's belief that audiences do not find these characters unsympathetic. Were there any question of inviting them into their own homes, for instance, I am convinced that most people would bar their doors impregnably. If that is true, however, and they would refuse to welcome these characters in life, it is difficult to see why people welcome them so warmly and so persistently in plays.

They do so, I am inclined to think, because nowadays, although the theatre may please us as strongly as it did in the past, it pleases us in a different way. Years ago, plays bulged with nobility and rectitude; unsullied heroes; seraphic heroines; kindly, courteous minor parts. It is true that usually the villains were implacably villainous, but only so that the purity of the other characters might shine the whiter by contrast. Broadly speaking, these conditions constituted the theatrical régime for many years, during which people went to the theatre when they wanted to escape into an existence on a more ideal plane.

Recently, however, we have become more and more prosaic; temporary trips to rarer altitudes appeal to us less strongly. Instead of trying to escape into its illusion, audiences now tend to stare the theatre coldly and detachedly in the face. When they began to do that, the play full of model characters, so far from satisfying people, annoyed them, because it rubbed in the imperfections and grievances which

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blemished their own lives. Women compared the perfunctory attentions of their husbands with the whole-hearted gallantry of the hero, and sighed; while men longed in vain for a girl so unfailingly sweet-tempered and ingenuously trusting as the heroine. Even the villain became a source of irritation; for in the play he was invariably worsted, whereas everyone knew that the particular villain harassing their own affairs all too frequently was not. In short, such plays tantalized people to the point of exasperation; they went home from them brooding enviously on the hardships of their lot.

And so plays of the modern type came into favour. Their characters excite no admiration; so their audiences are contented. They can reflect with satisfaction on the number of unpleasant persons allowed to crawl about in plays from whom their own homes, however, can happily be kept immune. From plays, too, people can now derive salve for their own anxieties and misfortunes. The householder who has suffered a mild burglary remembers the blood-spattering desperadoes of Mr. Wallace, and consoles himself with: "Things might have been much worse." The ultra-respectable mother, who is distressed by her daughter's addiction to vivid make-up, witnesses Miss Bankhead stormily reduce herself, in a crowded room, to a state of lingerie, and then goes home thinking: "Well, Mary may look dreadfully fast sometimes, but at all events I can trust her not to go making *those* kind of exhibitions of herself. Yes, when I see a play like that I realize I have a lot to be thankful for." So far from humiliating its audiences with a sense of the inferiority of their own relations and acquaintances, as a play often did in the past, its modern successor flatteringly reassures them. After an evening spent with its characters people can reconcile themselves with ease, indeed with joyful self-congratulation, to even the most repulsive of human beings who mar their lives. And in this comforting encouragement lies the attraction of the present-day theatre.

And yet my friend's agent condemned her play because the characters are "unsympathetic"! He baffles me. I should have supposed that had someone asked him:

"What's the play to write for making money, nowadays?" he would have replied: "The great point is to write about unlikable people. Make your characters thoroughly unsympathetic—see the idea?"

The most bewildering circumstances of all is that my friend's characters (I have read her play) are *not* unsympathetic. They are not consistently rude to each other; none of them commits murder or adultery; they do not undress in public. One would be pleased to take her women in to dinner; one would not even object to spending a week-end with her men. Indeed, none of her characters is detestable, and several of them are definitely lovable.

The agent, I am told, is a shrewd, successful man. It seems impossible that he can be making some gigantic blunder. Pondering the enigma again, I conclude that I have been puzzling myself unnecessarily, seeking an involved explanation where the true one is very simple. It lies in a typist's error. What the agent really dictated was: "... but the characters are sympathetic, so I fear ..."

GOOD WORK AT LITTLE BADDOW

I was present lately at a performance by the people of this small village in Essex, which was really a striking example of what can be done by village folk in a very small hall, on the simplest of means—given a leader of ideals and ability.

I was told that both the plays on the programme—"Golden Wings" and "Misse insists," were written by Mrs. Nicholson, the President of the Women's Institute, the music composed by Mrs. Eckersley, a neighbour, the dresses designed and made on the spot—and in fact the genuine community spirit exemplified. Directly I entered the hall, I realized that here was a stage-setting within the reach of any village,—yet of a quiet beauty and simplicity which promised well for the performance. Green hangings carried out the subdued green of the flooring on the upper stage, well-managed lighting (properly concealed) helped to give atmosphere, a painted proscenium under the beamed roof supplied a delicate filling-in of colour—while the lower stage was simply the schoolroom floor, separated from the audiences by chains of evergreens on posts, and camouflaged as to windows and walls with laurels and ivy.

Nor did the play "Golden Wings" fall short of the setting. A pretty phantasy of "When the Gods walked the earth," it proved a charming medium for excellent acting, attractive and well-thought-out dancing, and strikingly beautiful dresses.

The second play, as a play, certainly needed some pulling together—but some excellent performances were given, notably by Mrs. Nicholson herself.

MARY PAKINGTON

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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THE Council of the League has now carefully considered the resolutions passed at the Sheffield Conference. The resolution as to the Author's Fees question has been ratified, and a Committee has been appointed to suggest certain revisions in the League's constitution, which it is intended to modify so as to bring it more into line with the recent development of the League. The suggested revision will be circulated well in time for consideration by the members of the League prior to the Annual General Meeting at the end of June. In particular the revision will be found to include a rule by which the Annual Conference shall be recognized as part of the official machinery of the League. Hitherto the Conference has been a purely unofficial and advisory body. It has grown in importance from very small beginnings; and although its recommendations have almost invariably been adopted by the

Council, it is manifest that in accordance with the resolution passed at Sheffield, its actual status and powers should be defined in the rules of the League.

The prospectus of the Third London Easter School for amateur producers is ready and may be had on application to the League. Now that there have been several provincial schools, some of them under League auspices, as well as our own two previous schools at Kensington, we have planned the forthcoming school in April on the assumption that some of the students will be ready for more advanced work. Yet a few of those who come to us with considerable experience have something to unlearn. Novices, on the other hand, often prove themselves capable of appreciating subtleties of technique. The prospectus speaks for itself, but we wish to draw special attention to the fact that the Final of the National Festival of Community Drama on April 8, falls within the ten days' period of the school. This will provide an attractive feature in the school's programme, and facilities will be arranged for students to be present at the *matinée* and to meet the competing companies.

London, Cambridge and Leicester, had a rare experience last month in the visit of M. Jacques Copeau, who presented his Company in a fantastic play "L'Illusion" (based on an old Spanish comedy) and in Molière's "L'Ecole des Maris" and "Le Medecin Malgre Lui." The Molière plays were of extreme interest, but most critics felt "L'Illusion" to provide the more emphatic expression of the fundamental qualities of M. Copeau's art. The play with all its meandering charm mattered not so much as the opportunity it offered for M. Copeau to deploy, as it were, the varied talents of a Company nourished from day to day and from month to month at the hands of their great teacher. For the students of M. Copeau share his life, and thus attain a unity of idea and of method which must be the despair of actors whose training for any play is confined to the happy-go-lucky rough and tumble of a three weeks' rehearsal.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

- "A History of Costume." By Carl Köhler. Edited and augmented by Emma von Sichert. Translated by A. K. Dallas. Harrap. 18s.
- "Playwriting for Profit." By Arthur Edwin Krows. Longmans. 21s.
- "Readings from British Drama." By Allardyce Nicoll. Harrap. 10s. 6d.
- "The Axe of Brandomar." By George Graveley. Cayme Press. 2s. 6d.
- "Seven Modern Comedies." By Lord Dunsany. Putnam. 5s.
- "The Return." By Charles Bennett. "The Light Comedian." By Herman Ould. Benn. 3s. 6d. each
- "The Angel that Troubled the Waters." By Thornton Wilder. Longmans. 6s.

THE first book on this month's list is one of those books for which I have been hoping against hope ever since I began working in the theatre. Of all the books on costume I know, this is, I think, the most practical and useful to the theatrical designer. So many otherwise excellent costume books discuss in detail the ultimate shape and appearance of costumes, their colour and decoration, but are rather sketchy in their descriptions of how the costumes were cut and pieced together. Here is a book which does explain all this, and explains it so clearly and so exactly than any competent modern dressmaker, without any knowledge of period costume, should have no difficulty in reproducing the costumes. Another great merit of the book is the attention it pays to the choice of materials, explaining why certain materials were used and just how important was the material for the correct shape and hang of the dress. Another point of great practical importance which is fully dealt with for the first time is the way in which the costumes were stuffed and lined. Although the book is the result of amazingly painstaking research, covering every period from the peoples of antiquity down to the middle of the last century, it is by no means just a collection of illustrations and patterns explained in technical fashion. It is far more than a text book: pleasantly written and admirably translated, it makes an extremely readable and fascinating book to anyone even mildly interested in history or archaeology. There are over six hundred illustrations, including many photographs of original costumes worn by living people. And finally, to mention just one other of this book's many virtues, it is published at a price which is extremely low for a book of this kind.

The next book on the list has considerably less practical usefulness than its size and title might lead one to expect. It would be a very much better book if it were half its present length. The author wastes far too much space explaining in great detail the most elementary platitudes of playwriting. If an aspiring playwright has so little common gumption and so little theatre sense that he needs all these explained to him it is hardly likely that he will ever write a play worth seeing, however carefully he digests text-books. Nevertheless, anybody who braves Mr. Krows' huge wastes of platitude and has the tenacity to grapple with

his forbidding style will be rewarded with a great deal of excellent analysis and advice, illustrated with specimens from an extremely varied range of plays.

"Readings from British Drama" is a somewhat forbidding title for what turns out to be a surprisingly readable and entertaining book. Intended "to present by quotation and comment a broad outline of the main movements in the world of the theatre from mediæval times to the present day," it succeeds in being representative without being hackneyed. I imagine that few people however well-read in the drama, will fail to discover excerpts which are well worth reading from plays about which they hitherto knew little or nothing.

Of this month's plays one of the most interesting is Mr. Graveley's "The Axe of Brandomar," based on a story of Edward I as prince. The play has an air of complete simplicity which is a little misleading. Although I can imagine it being very successfully produced by comparatively unsophisticated amateurs before, say, a village audience, I would prefer to see it performed with thoroughly sophisticated production, acting, costumes and scenery.

All seven of Lord Dunsany's new one-act plays contain a highly original and effective situation, but in nearly every case the author has relied on the easiest and most farcical methods of exploiting his idea so that the book reads more like a collection of charades than the work of an author who has written plays as fine as "The Gods of the Mountain." Still, it is a thoroughly amusing book to read.

The two new plays in the Contemporary Dramatists series are more worthy of the old standard of the series than most of the recent additions to it. In "The Return" Mr. Bennett has captured a big imaginative idea, but has frittered it away on a petty and commonplace story which squeezes the idea into insignificance. On the other hand, the dialogue and characterization are so rich and vivid that they atone for the play's other weaknesses and lead one to look forward to the author's future work with high expectations. "The Light Comedian" is a whimsical and very charming comedy with an original flavour, but spoiled, to my mind, by a conventional happy ending which marries off two people so thoroughly unsuited to live happily together ever afterwards that one finishes the play with the gloomiest forebodings as to the future of its very attractive leading character.

Mr. Thornton Wilder's book of short plays will be a disappointment to anyone looking forward to a book which would provide something really original for a one-act bill. The author does not make it clear whether he intends any of these plays to be acted, but several are obviously impossible on practical grounds and all are written without the smallest sense of the theatre. The best part of the book is the foreword in which Mr. Wilder discusses the forces governing the impulse to write. The "plays" themselves are dialogues on religious themes in the style of "The World's Pilgrim" which did much the same thing rather more successfully.

THE PLAY IN THE SCHOOL

IV.—THE GREEK PLAY AT BRADFIELD

By John Haldane Blackie

ALTHOUGH there are records of performances of Aristophanes in the College Hall at Bradfield in the 1850's the history of the Greek Play as it is now known does not begin until 1880, the year in which the Rev. H. B. Gray was appointed to the hitherto separate offices of Warden and Headmaster. The school was in a bad way financially and there were even rumours that it was to come to an end. It may therefore be imagined that the new Headmaster found himself a busy man. All the more remarkable is it that by 1882 he had found time to arrange for a performance of the *Alcestis* of Euripides in Hall, a function, we learn from the *Reading Mercury*, attended by the local nobility and gentry and by Mr. Oscar Browning. The *Bradfield College Chronicle* remarked upon the fact that Bradfield was the only school to give such representations, and expressed satisfaction that it could now be ranked in this respect with the Universities of Oxford and Harvard.

It was in 1890 that Dr. Gray extended the play to its present form. A visit to Epidaurus had put into his head the idea of a model Greek theatre in England. Fortunately an admirable site was available, in the shape of a disused chalk-quarry close to the college gateway, and early in February the Headmaster and the Sixth Form set to work with picks and spades. By April the pit had begun to assume the rough outlines of a Greek amphitheatre, and during the Easter holidays workmen arrived and built up nine concrete tiers and a stage building of orthodox design. The theatre was finished on the ninth of June, the first performance having been arranged for the twenty-fourth. The speed of its conception and of the subsequent carrying-out of the plan was typical of its creator.

In the *Chronicle* for June, 1890, we find a description of the place. "The dimensions of the seats are true to the old Hellenic measurements, both as regards width and depth, and the system of

separating seat from seat by lines marked on the stone (a pardonable euphemism —J. H. B.) has been preserved. The *paradoi* or entrances slope gradually from the sides of the stage buildings down to the *orchestra* and will, according to the ancient method, serve as entrances both for chorus and audience, so that the latter cannot be fashionably late without marring the action of the play." The situation could hardly have been happier. Surrounded by great trees, with bushes of lilac, wistaria and honeysuckle, and with ivy trailing over the ground behind, the theatre is shut off from the world and its racket. When, during one of the performances in the present year, three aeroplanes flew over and interrupted a particularly dramatic speech, they presented a contrast for which some were almost grateful. Apart from the addition of nine more tiers in 1898, raising the seating capacity to 1,600, some alterations to the setting of the stage, and the added charm of age and weathering, the place remains in 1928 much as it was nearly forty years ago.

The play selected for that first venture was the *Antigone* of Sophocles. Later a fixed cycle of three (the play being triennial) was decided upon, the remaining two being the *Alcestis* and the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus. This was never varied until 1928 when, for a variety of reasons, the *Rhesus* was substituted for the *Alcestis*. All the parts were played by boys in the school except three, one of these being the Coryphæus, played by Dr. Gray himself. The masters took parts until the jubilee year of 1900 when the whole cast was composed of boys, a custom that has been followed ever since. When it is remembered that it is necessary to find a large number of boys who are not only good actors but also Greek scholars and, in the case of the chorus, singers of a sort as well, it will be seen what a difficult task is the Bradfield producer's, a task that the decline of Greek as a school subject has not made easier.

THE GREEK PLAY AT BRADFIELD

Music had to be composed especially for the play, as Mendelssohn's settings were for an English version only. This was undertaken on the first two occasions by the Rev. J. P. Powley, the Precentor of the College. He was succeeded by Mr. C. F. Abdy-Williams, an authority on Greek music, who endeavoured to produce compositions founded on the ancient modes, with results that were more interesting than exciting. Bearing in mind that the audiences were not composed solely of scholars and antiquarians, the authorities decided to abandon Mr. Abdy-Williams' music and some new settings were composed by the next Precentor, Dr. S. J. Rowton. One of these was used in 1922 for the *Antigone*, and was described by a leading journal as "hymn-tunes gone wrong." So in 1925 the present Director of the College music (the title Precentor has lapsed), Mr. D. G. A. Fox, composed some charming music. In 1928 the music of Dr. Ernest Walker, composed for the O.U.D.S., was employed. The orchestra is composed of flutes and lyres, and until the present year has always been able to render the accompaniments unassisted. Dr. Walker's music, however, was written for a modern orchestra and it was found necessary to supplement the boys with a concealed string, brass and wood-wind band behind. The task of conducting this band in the semi-darkness and general hurly-burly of the wings, synchronising it with the flutes and lyres who were outside in full view of the audience, as well as with the chorus who were performing evolutions fifteen yards away, was a task that can be described, on the authority of Mr. Fox himself, as a nightmare. Those who were present will remember what a pleasant, orderly and well-conducted nightmare it was.

Gray was nothing if not thorough, and he requested the Sixth Form to publish a translation in English verse for the use of the less scholarly members of the audience. This they did, on top of all their other work, and the tradition was preserved until the war. In 1922 and 1924 it lapsed, to be revived in 1928. In 1898 we find the *Chronicle* making the follow-

ing slightly preposterous claim: "We can only say in these columns that the work is a contribution to the literature of the day," but in 1900 it can afford to be more modest: "We cannot, however, go quite so far as the enthusiastic critic of *The Times* who discerned in Mr. Parsons' * portion 'something of the quality of Newman's religious and gnomic verse.'" The translation, in sober fact, has usually been competent, and occasionally brilliant. As an example may be quoted the following by Mr. L. C. Glass of

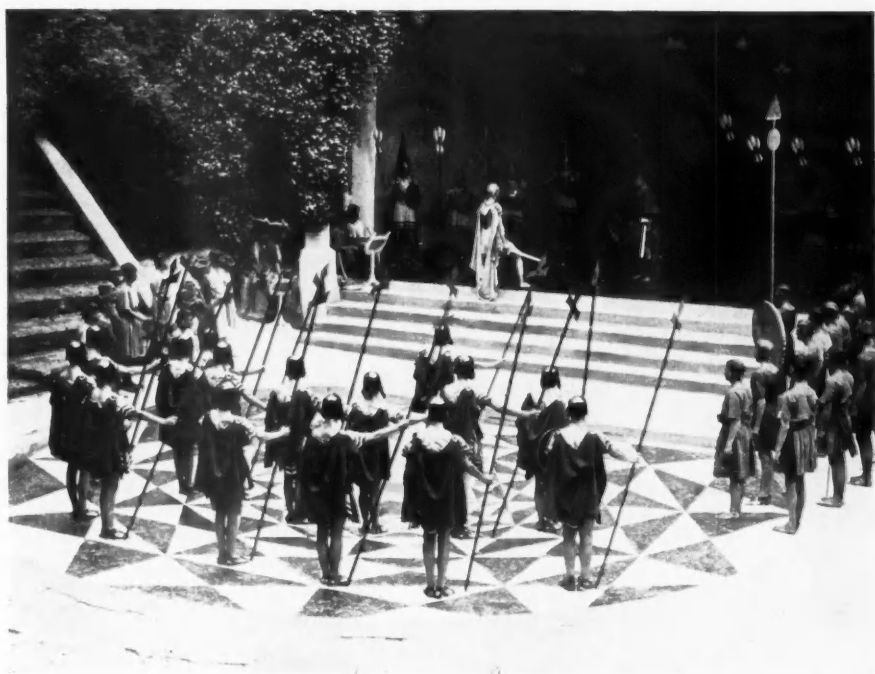
Ἀδράστεια μὲν ἂ Διὸς
in the *Rhesus*. (Antistrophe I.)

Aye, Strymon, the torrent, hath sent thee to save,
Who swept in his passion in eddying storm,
Through thy mother, the Muse, in a wild love
wave,

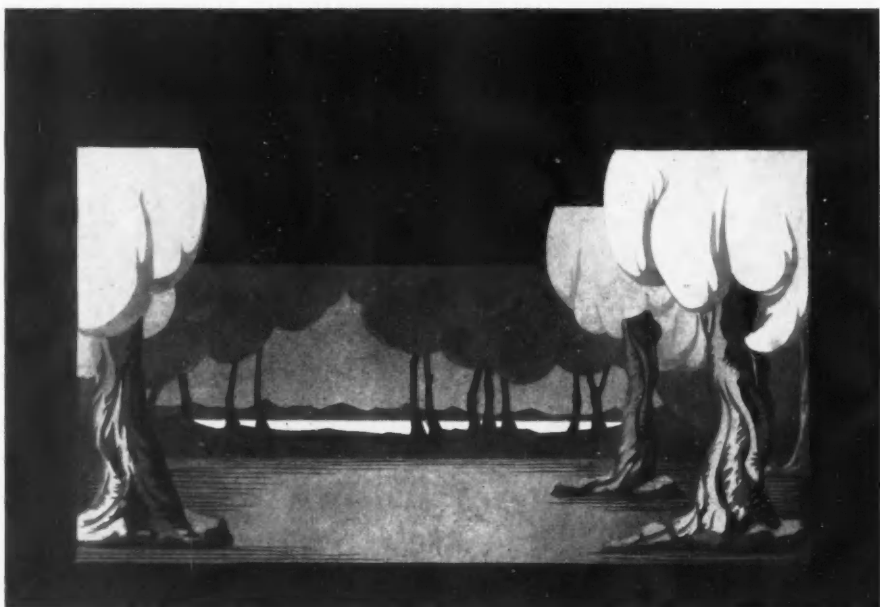
From her white virgin body begetting thy form.
It is Zeus who speeds
With his dark-dappled steeds,
The deliverer Zeus, etc.

The dresses, until 1925, were designed and executed by the ladies of the staff and have always been pleasant and usually archaically correct. In 1890 Dr. Sandys, then Public Orator of Cambridge, wrote: "The flute-player was draped in a white *chiton* and soft green *himation* and looked exactly as if he had come out of a picture by Mr. Alma-Tadema," a compliment that, in those days, was in no way a doubtful one. In 1925 the services of Mr. Bruce Winston were enlisted, and he brought about a profound change in the scene. It is impossible to do justice to the effect of the masses of colour, the daring combinations, the kaleidoscopic changes, that made up the glittering spectacle of the *Rhesus*. The *Birds* at Cambridge in 1924 was but a drab show in comparison. Naturally much of it was spoilt when the day was a rainy one, the dress of the *Rhesus* himself being particularly dependent for its full effect upon the presence of brilliant sunshine, but that was a circumstance over which even Mr. Winston could have no control. Bradfield, by the way, has produced two scene-designers of eminence in Mr. Gordon Craig and Mr. Aubrey Hammond. It would be interesting, if either should ever be given the scenery and dressing of a

* Alan Parsons, I.C.S.



SCENE FROM THE RHESUS OF
SOPHOCLES AS PERFORMED AT
BRADFIELD COLLEGE



SCENE FOR ACTS I AND II OF
"THE SEAGULL" BY CHEKOF.
DESIGNED BY MURIEL STERLING
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PRODUCTION AT HUDDERSFIELD

THE GREEK PLAY AT BRADFIELD

Greek play at their old school, to see the respective ways in which they would handle it. Mr. Craig, in particular, might do some wonderful things, and in any case it is always good to try new experiments. This, I should add, is in no sense an attempt to cast a slur on my friend Mr. Winston, whose work I admire beyond all saying.

In the golden summer of 1914, the glories of which are now almost legendary, the *Alcestis* was given, and even allowing for the roseate mists which encircle that period, it seems clear that it was an exceptional performance. In the years that followed the play was naturally abandoned and in 1918 the school had recently passed through the second great crisis of its history. For a year or two it seemed likely that the play would become another pre-war recollection, a fear to which so weighty an authority as the *Oxford Magazine* gave its support. Such a miserable catastrophe was happily averted, and Mr. J. H. Vince, Bradfield's former producer, having resigned, Mr. Cyril King, late of King's College, Cambridge, and a disciple therein of Mr. J. T. Sheppard, was appointed, and set out to re-create a lost tradition. His position was no less difficult than that of Gray in 1890, more so in some respects, for whereas then three-quarters of the school read Greek, that divine tongue had now become an alternative to Science or German. Mr. King, however, was fortunate. He found an *Antigone*, a *Creon*, a *Tiresias* and a *Coryphæus* of most unusual excellence. The production was a remarkable one. A generation had arisen not one of whom had ever seen a Bradfield play, and yet, as the present writer, who took an obscure part in it, well remembers, it seemed as if something that had lain dormant for eight years had come suddenly to life, and the play was performed with confidence and self-assurance.

Shortly afterwards Mr. King unfortunately felt the call of co-education and left Bradfield for Bedales. Luckily a more than worthy successor was found for him in Mr. Cecil Bellamy, of Trinity College, Oxford. Mr. Bellamy was not an old Brad-

fieldian and had never seen a performance, so that he was not likely to be a slave to tradition. Before 1914 the keynote of the plays tended to be as strict a conformity as possible to what was known of Athenian customs. Indeed, in early years the notices forbidding smoking in the auditorium were printed in Greek, a practice subsequently abandoned as inadequate. Mr. Bellamy, though he was no iconoclast, wisely decided that in the choice between dramatic force and archaic correctness, the latter must be subordinated to the former. His productions have lost something of the atmosphere of religious ceremonies, but they have gained in intensity and have held 16,000 persons spellbound. It is, after all, the spirit of the Greek drama which is important, and not its trappings. Merely as an archaic revival the play would scarcely justify the time, trouble and money that is spent upon it. But as a means of opening up a whole field of experience, experience too which has so signally preserved its value over twenty-four centuries, it cannot be rated too high.

The theatre, it must be admitted, is, like the play, a triennial event. During the interval it is abandoned to the pleasant desolation of old leaves and becomes a habitation for the owls. From time to time in the summer a concert is given there, and once, in 1924, the O.U.D.S. came down and played *Twelfth Night*. That the place is suitable for certain modern plays can hardly be doubted. Shortly before writing this I was in Palladio's theatre at Vicenza, and thought how delightful an addition such a perspective, though perhaps less baroque in design, would be to the Bradfield theatre. It is, however, obviously impossible to have elaborate dramatic performances continually taking place. At least there are House Dramatic Societies which play Shakespeare and modern plays and which form excellent training grounds for "Greekers," and the project of founding an Old Bradfieldian Strollers Club, if it ever matures, might mean that the theatre would be in more frequent use. In any case it is a possession which, the Greek Play apart, is at least a potential asset.

LETTER FROM MR. BASIL DEAN

SIR,—Mr. Terence Gray is upset because in a recent book review I ventured to criticise certain aspects of the work of the Festival Theatre, Cambridge. He uses the word "attack," but all experimenters in the theatre must be prepared to accept criticism with reasonable good will. That particular Art Theatre was mentioned because, unless I am much mistaken, almost the whole of Mr. Ridge's practical experiments in the lighting principles set forth in his book, have taken place at Cambridge. Mr. Gray dislikes the suggestion that his theatre may be favoured in any way by his own munificence. Yet I doubt whether even he would seriously maintain that, after due allowance for interest on capital invested, depreciation and so forth, the Festival Theatre is a commercial enterprise in the common acceptance of that phrase. If I am wrong, I invite Mr. Gray to publish his balance sheets for the information and guidance of us all in the future.

But, to come to the real point of my criticism, it is not necessary to visit a theatre to criticise its programme and its policy. One can discern these things quite easily through the usual channels of press critiques and advance notices issued by the theatre management in question. By way of example, on page 29 of the November issue of *DRAMA*, in which my review was published, there is printed the programme for the seventh

season of the Festival Theatre. In that programme there does not appear the name of one single new and original work. Apart from the list of plays and the names of the producers, the only other direct reference to the Theatre's work is an announcement concerning a modernist German experiment in stage lighting and production. It is so clear from this announcement and from the references in Mr. Ridge's book, where the chiefest interest of the Festival Theatre lies, that one is surprised at Mr. Gray's somewhat vehement protest.

This question of the reluctance of Art Theatres to produce original work, and their preference for experiments in forms of presentation, is a serious one. It has remained a general criticism of such enterprises since the days when I was a junior member of the first of the English Art Theatres, although I honestly believe, by the light of subsequent events, the criticism was less justified in that earlier instance than in any subsequent one. I repeat what I said in my review, that "an individual Art Theatre that seeks to matter in the life of the community should occupy itself primarily with the discovery of new talents of authorship, with the fostering of genuine acting ability."

Yours etc.,

BASIL DEAN

THE RESTRICTION OF ROYALTIES

By Nevil Truman

GRADUALLY it is being admitted that the present system of royalties on a fixed basis per performance is inequitable, but the public opinion of the amateur world must be strengthened until it grows into such a power that it will achieve the reforms which at present only the far-seeing envision.

It will easily be seen that a flat rate of five guineas per play, which is at present levied upon a performance in a hall seated to capacity with a thousand people, and also upon one where the audience numbers a hundred or two, heavily penalises the smaller presentation. For such as these a percentage basis such as has been outlined in "Drama" will remove much of the injustice.

Agreement will also be given to the fact that similar injustice arises when the royalty is the same for a production not run for profit and for one in which large profits are made.

But the point which most people seem to have overlooked, and more especially the authors themselves, is that a rigid adherence to the present method really only results in penalising the authors and not the actors, since it is obvious that plays to which a heavy royalty latched will be avoided by amateur dramatic selection committees.

It is not a question of unwillingness to pay an author those fees which are the just reward of his

industry, his fertility of imagination and his skill in the art of the playwright. A writer is just as much entitled to reward for his labour (if not more so) than a manual labourer. Indeed I would advance the claim that the author is far more entitled to reward since his trade is intellectual not manual, and by force of nature, intellects are more rare than hands—it is the old battle of brains versus brawn. The scarcer the commodity, the greater its economic value. And brains are undoubtedly scarce. No, the author is entitled to as much as he can get.

But authors as a class—or at any rate those who still hold out for the old ways—must realize that they and really they alone will suffer from the present method which ends in restricting the number of performances of their works. This is an age of advertising and surely five productions at a guinea royalty each are more valuable than one at five guineas, even though the monetary result is the same.

With all the will in the world, amateurs cannot do more than they are doing. As a section of the community, they invariably have very slender financial reserves; each season they must make ends meet; their subscriptions are small for the simple reason that they cannot obtain high rates from their members, who are distinguished by their keenness for drama rather than their ability

THE RESTRICTION OF ROYALTIES

to sign large cheques. And amateur actors will always be a minority of the population.

The present system is not only bad for the authors for the reasons I have shown. It is (where the plays are good) bad for the audiences since they are not able to witness many plays because the royalty bars them. This means that a large number of amateur companies are now restricted to producing old time-expired and therefore royalty-free works, or those of the lesser known, and often weaker dramatists whose royalties are smaller or non-existent. The public of the

amateur world is getting into a hackneyed rut. Look down the columns of announcements, and you will find the same old plays, mostly Victorian, put on in town after town. Some of them had point in their day, but this is 1928, and our drama if it is to be effective, must talk in terms of 1928 and think with the mind of those around us.

These considerations need deliberating upon when royalties are discussed; for it is only by clear thinking that we shall be able to achieve the best reformation we need.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

SWINTON PLAYERS

The boldness of the South Yorkshire Drama Federation in holding a Local Festival within six months of the Federation's inauguration was fully justified. On November 7 and 8, at Swinton, four coalfield-township producing societies put over successfully four entries in the National Festival to big houses. The four plays were got through each evening in two hours forty minutes without a noticeable hitch or a moment's boredom of the audiences. Hampered as they were of stage, wing and dressing room space Mr. Rowlands and his staff contrived four convincing changes of setting and props, to the satisfaction of the four competing producers, and kept the intervals down to an average of twelve minutes. The enthusiasm of the audiences was unmistakable evidence that the Festival has caught on; indeed it has given the amateur theatre in the South Yorkshire coalfield a great fillip and the Federation must plan on a bigger scale for next year.

None of the competing societies were more than three years old but they reached an unexpectedly high standard of production and acting. The programme opened with Wombwell Thespians' production of Brighouse's "Price of Coal"; Birdwell W.E.A. Players gave an original work by their producer—a coal-miner—"Black Dogs" (producer, Machon Ibbotson); and Swinton Players rounded off an excellent evening's entertainment with Lennox Robinson's charming little comedy, "Crabbed Youth and Age" (producer, Leslie A. Gavin).

THE KENSINGTON DRAMATIC SOCIETY

There has been quite a run of American crook plays in the West End theatres during the past year. The vogue for such plays has reached the amateur stage, and the Kensington Dramatic Society chose such a play by Willard Marie, entitled "Kick In," for their performance in aid of the Westminster Hospital and St. Stephen's, Southwark, New Parish Hall Fund, at the Rudolph Steiner Hall on Friday and Saturday, November 16 and 17.

MANCHESTER UNNAMED SOCIETY

Whilst offering enthusiastic tribute to that pioneer and audacious spirit that has become second nature

to the Unnamed Society, not everyone would agree with the wisdom of their latest venture.

Flecker's "Don Juan" in its present form, is a somewhat unplayable play. It contains very many long—almost interminable speeches—some of which, in lyrical form, become suddenly and surprisingly beautiful. But not only do these put the heaviest possible strain on the players but create pardonably self-conscious difficulties for those who, as listeners, have to stand about the stage.

An original and at times, extremely effective method of stage setting designed and painted by Margaret Nicholls rather hampered the exits and entrances and general stage "business."

There is nothing but praise for the players who supported (there is no other word) all their difficulties with fortitude and endurance.

Noël Tomlinson's "Juan" (that weird rebellious seeker after Truth of whom his creator had such hopes) was something exceptional. So also was Mamie Nairn's Anna, a strange and complex character to define.

The smaller parts were finely played—notably "Mary" and "Bill" by Dorothy Crosse and Eric Newton. The statue, so cleverly achieved by L. Oppenheimer was an almost unearthly marvel! "Owen Jones" played by J. Edward Roberts, was one of the finest studies of an excellent cast.

LOUISE HARBOURNE

WELWYN GARDEN CITY

Current and future amateur dramatic productions at Welwyn Garden City, are "Grumpy," by the Barnstormers on November 19. "Iolanthe," by Welwyn Garden City Operatic Society on December 3, 4 and 5. "The Great Adventure" (Arnold Bennett) by the New Stagers, on December 17. "Bluebell in Fairyland" an original pantomime with 140 performers to be produced on December 20 and 21, by the Shredded Wheat Dramatic Society.

"Foundations" (Galsworthy) by Welwyn Garden City Theatre Society on January 14. "Hindle Wakes," to be produced by the Folk Players on February 4 in aid of the South Wales Miners Distress Fund.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

THE BOURNEMOUTH DRAMATIC AND ORCHESTRAL CLUB Ninth and Tenth Seasons

The Club opened its ninth season (September 1927—May, 1928) with 666 members and presented the following programme:

Monthly "at homes"; September, "Autumn Fire"; October, "At Mrs. Beam's"; November, "Games of Chance," "The Plumber's Opera"; January, "Make-Believe"; February, "Under Cover"; March, "French Leave"; April, "The Critic"; May, "Lord Richard in the Pantry."

Theatre productions: December, "Arms and the Man"; "Hay Fever."

Four "Members Only" evenings were organized for the purpose of giving new members an opportunity of presenting one-act sketches, and their programmes included ballet, solo dances, songs, monologues, mimes and so on.

Tenth Season, September, 1928—May, 1929

The Club opened its tenth season with 728 members and has so far presented at the monthly "at homes"—

September, "Billeted"; October, "Granite."

The programme for the rest of the season includes "The Dover Road" and "The Rising Generation" at "at homes"; "Granite," "The Sport of Kings" and "The Skin Game" at the theatre in December.

WATFORD SCHOOL OF MUSIC DRAMATIC SOCIETY

The Watford School of Music Dramatic Society were perhaps a little ambitious in their choice of "The High Road" for their performance on November 14. They were handicapped by a very small stage and it was not easy to present convincingly the drawing room of one of the stately homes of England in an area so restricted that one thought with pity of the proverbial swung cat. The players, however, moved with discretion and after a somewhat halting opening the play went easily and quickly. I do not remember ever having seen an amateur performance at which the attention was less distracted by aimless movements, and Miss Lloyd-King is to be congratulated on her careful production. Mr. Derek Birch was particularly admirable in this respect and his performance in the part of Sir Reginald was outstanding.

If the performance as a whole was rather uneven there was a very pleasant atmosphere of good-fellowship about the production to which a quite exceptionally good orchestra contributed its share.

D. C.

HOLIDAY FELLOWSHIP (London Group)

"Dear Brutus," by J. M. Barrie, is a difficult play for amateurs of great experience and expression, needing as it does that spirit of fantasy which circles round "Lot" and his witcheries. The Holiday Fellowship Dramatic Group turned fantasy into farce.

I think, perhaps, "Under Cover," which the Holiday Fellowship will give for their next performance in March, is a wiser choice.

J. RITLAT

VICTORIA HALL, BLOOMSBURY SQUARE.

On Tuesday evening, December 4, a variety entertainment of a somewhat unusual character was given before a large and interested audience. With one exception the programme consisted of items composed by Marie Russell, comprising poems, sketches, songs and monologues. Space prevents us dwelling on all these items. The sketch "What will Celia Say?" was an excellent bit of writing about an artist and his model; its dramatic effect, however, was unfortunately marred by the extreme nervousness of the players (whose voices were mostly inaudible to all but those in the first few rows) and the all-too-frequent evidence of the prompter. "Sukie's Silk Scarf," a most amusing little Cockney sketch was very well given by Yvonne Fuzzard and Barbara Carr whose united efforts made, we think, the best impression of the evening upon the audience. There was some graceful dancing by Mary Montgomery in two sketches with a Grecian atmosphere, "Phryne and the Sculptor" and "In Love with Fortune," the latter being altogether expressed by interpretational dancing.

Most of the performers at this entertainment were, by kind permission, students from the Fay Compton Studio of Dramatic Art, and they obviously welcomed the opportunity of "trying themselves" on an audience, which was surely an excellent experience for them.

Miss Caird Lothian prepared and produced the whole show, and we can heartily congratulate her and Miss Russell upon her achievement; she has a keen sense of stage effects, lighting, scenery, etc., and her production of the varied programme left little to be desired.

FLORENCE MARKS

THE CITY PLAYERS AT CRIPPLEGATE

At the Cripplegate Theatre on Thursday, November 1, the City Players, presenting Brieux' "False Gods," gave a large audience the opportunity of seeing a play seldom performed since Sir Herbert Tree's original production many years ago.

More than common credit is therefore due to the City Players and their producer, Miss Charlotte Davies, for the courage and skill with which they bore the dead weight of an undramatic dramatist. To his superabundant intelligence they added humanity and emotional force—the elements without which there can be no drama.

The principals, Yaoouma (Mary Jay), blind Mieris (Marjorie Ballantyne), Rheou (James Gordon), and Satni (Frank O. M. Smith) played with an admirable sense of balance, accommodating their emotions discreetly to Brieux' rhetoric.

The beauty and archæological accuracy of the Egyptian dresses (made by the company) were unfortunately nullified to a large extent by the ineffectiveness of the facial make-up, but at the end of the City Players' performance of a very long and difficult piece, one could not fail to be deeply appreciative of the ability with which they had handled their intractable material.

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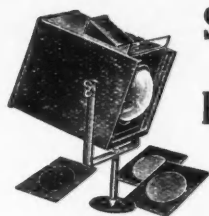
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